

## **New Russian Public Diplomacy: Conceptualization, Practice and Limitations**

### **Abstract:**

As Russia recovered from its chaotic days of the 1990s, its leaders became increasingly concerned about their country's international image and standing. There was also increasing recognition that in the information age formal as well as "new" public diplomacy (PD) have become integral components in any international actor's pursuit of interests. Hence, as Russia began to clarify its identity and global role – for itself as well as for the international community – it also started to pay increasing attention to its PD, particularly in its "near abroad", which it still regards as its own sphere of influence, and the West, where it seeks recognition and acceptance. However, Russia's political and strategic culture does not encourage decentralized and networked approaches, while top-down and state-supported initiatives largely get dismissed as propaganda by the Western public. Given the prevalence of historical stereotypes and selective perception, Russian PD would benefit greatly from relationships between non-state actors, as well as non-traditional and alternative information approaches that harness the potential of new media and social networking. This paper will examine the discussion of PD within Russia and will look at several examples of its practical limitations within the context of New PD.

### **Introduction**

Over the past decade, as Russia recovered from its dark chaotic days of the 1990s, the Russian leadership has been making an increasing effort not only to consolidate social and political order at home, but also to enhance Russia's international status. However, as data from Gallup – surveying public opinion in close to 100 countries worldwide – suggests, the approval of Russia's "global leadership" role still remains the lowest among the seven major international actors (Clifton, 2011). The case is particularly visible in the United States, where public opinion of Russia and its foreign policy still remains largely unfavorable. Historical stereotypes – as reflected in cultural and literary representations – as well as the Cold War superpower rivalry of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century might provide valid explanations for such attitudes. However, two decades have passed since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, while the US-Russian relationship has gradually improved, bringing the two countries together through bilateral as well as larger multilateral cooperation. Yet, this does not seem to have affected perceptions among the broader public, whose attitudes have persisted since the days of the Cold War and arguably, have very little to do with the recent Russian political developments or policies (Lebedenko, 2004; Rukavishnikov, 2004; Tsygankov, 2009).

Given globalization and rapidly changing information trends around the world, such negative

attitudes by the Western public pose a major issue for Russia's foreign policy implementation, creating barriers and undercutting international goodwill that is much-needed for achieving its foreign policy objectives. What is more, closer integration with the West and recognition of its "Great Power" status have reemerged as international priorities (Clunan, 2009; Mankoff, 2009; Oliker, Crane, Schwartz, & Yusupov, 2009; Tsygankov, 2010), which, however, remain unattainable without a general positive international acceptance of Russia. A good example here is Russia's membership in the World Trade Organization, which has proved to be a political issue as much as a technical one (ITAR-TASS, 2011). Kremlin recognizes the problem and, over the past decade, has begun paying close attention to its public diplomacy efforts in an attempt to boost its image, improve the West's understanding of Russia, and forge closer relationships with priority countries (Avgerinos, 2009; Bigg, 2006; Evans, 2005; Feklyunina, 2008, 2010; Lebedenko, 2004). However, as the polls indicate, these attempts have been largely ineffective in bringing about affection for or wide-spread positive attitude towards Russia (in the United States, at least). Therefore, it is important to understand the possible reasons for failure of Russia's public diplomacy efforts, whether in terms of Russia's formulations of the issue, the actual public diplomacy techniques employed, or the various contextual factors that play into the formation of foreign public opinion.

In exploring this particular issue, it is also important to look at how the conceptualization of the term "public diplomacy" has been translated and adopted into new contexts. As British scholar Robin Brown indicates, "The term public diplomacy is an American one and the central driver of the resurgence of interest in public diplomacy has been US policy problems" (2011, p. 2). According to him, the American history of public diplomacy is reflective of the institutional and cultural framework of the U.S., as well as its structural position within the international system, and therefore does not necessarily constitute a concept that can be easily applied to other countries that operate within other frameworks or face different challenges (R. Brown, 2011). Furthermore, Rhonda Zaharna (2010) says that public diplomacy – as any other act of communication – is inherently about how an actor sees itself and its role within the context of that communication, suggesting that the way an international actor conceptualizes and conducts public diplomacy is inevitably linked to their specific domestic as well as international circumstances. Thus, the objective of this research project is not only to examine the specific case of Russian public diplomacy in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, tracking the possible

origins of its various characteristics, but also to gain an understanding about how a non-Western state talks about and conducts its public diplomacy. This paper comprises three sections: the first briefly examines the conceptualization of “public diplomacy” by Western scholars and provides a short introduction to the formation of national identity and interests in post-Soviet Russia; the second focuses specifically on the discussion of public diplomacy as conceptualized by Russian officials and academics between 2000 and 2010; and the final section looks at two major examples of Russian public diplomacy initiatives within the United States, concluding with an evaluation of Russian approach to public diplomacy. Given the limitations in terms of time, resources and scope, this study is in no way a comprehensive analysis of the issue, but rather a general introduction with a lot of potential for further expansion.

### **Public Diplomacy**

In essence, public diplomacy is “an international actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public” (Cull, 2009, p. 12). Yet, the nature of the “international actors”, of their “environment” as well as that of their “engagement” has undergone fundamental transformation since the term came about, and has been subject to much debate, both among academics as well as practitioners.

Coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts University, the term “public diplomacy” was an attempt to differentiate American government’s work from the “propaganda” conducted by then arch-enemy Soviet Union (Cowan & Cull, 2008, p. 6). “Public diplomacy” then referred to U.S. Government’s attempts to explain its policies, through facilitating “interaction of groups, peoples, and cultures beyond national borders, influencing the way groups and peoples in other countries think about foreign affairs, react to our policies, and affect the policies of their respective governments” (quoted in J. Brown, 2010). Thus, it was an “umbrella label” for U.S. Government’s various international activities involving information dissemination, cultural relations, and broadcasting, with the purpose of attaining its foreign policy interests and objectives (Gregory, 2008, p. 275).

Joseph Nye sees public diplomacy as a part of an actor’s capacity to wield what he calls “soft power.” According to Nye, soft power is the “ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2008, p. 94). Hence, he sees the ultimate goal of soft power as influencing and shaping the preferences of others, in pursuit of

certain foreign policy objectives. Nye outlines three major resources of soft power: a country's culture and its attractiveness; its political values; and the perceived legitimacy of its policies (2008, p. 96). Nonetheless, he suggests that the relevance of all soft power resources ultimately lies in the acceptance, attraction and legitimacy given to them by the subjects, thus recognizing the actor's credibility as the major determinant in their ability to wield soft power (Nye, 2004, 2008).

However, many critics of the concept, as outlined by Nye, highlight that it does not address several fundamental questions: what are the *actual* sources of soft power and how can one cultivate it without pre-existing military, economic, or cultural dominance? If credibility lies at the heart of effective soft power, while public diplomacy does not automatically establish credibility, various attempts to wield those might result in a waste of valuable resources. More importantly, they might undercut the perceived legitimacy of the actor if the information is misinterpreted to further reinforce existing stereotypes or negative attitudes. Therefore, equating soft power with public diplomacy, particularly for international actors other than the United States, can not only be insufficient when strategizing for successful public diplomacy outcomes, but can also be inapplicable or even potentially detrimental.

Thus, it is essential to closely examine the concept of public diplomacy itself. Initial definitions of public diplomacy conceived it in terms of "a government's process of communicating with foreign publics" (Tuch quoted in Van Ham, 2010, p. 115). This definition, however, has become obsolete now as technological change has facilitated political transformation, as well. Coupled with the rapid democratization around the world, this transformation has also increased the significance of the people and non-state actors, who now have gained much greater leverage not only over their own government's foreign policy-making, but over international affairs in general (Nye, 2008). Nancy Snow describes this transition well:

Traditional *public* diplomacy has been about governments talking to global publics (G2P), and includes those efforts to inform, influence, and engage those publics in support of national objectives and foreign policies. More recently, public diplomacy involves the way in which both government *and* private individuals and groups influence directly and indirectly those public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions (P2P) [*sic*]. (Snow, 2009, p. 6)

Within this "New Public Diplomacy" and the age of real-time communication, long-term relationship building, dialogue – listening, genuine two-way communication, and openness – and multi-level engagement and collaboration have become major conditions for success

in any public diplomacy program (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008; Cull, 2009; Gregory, 2008; Melissen, 2007; Zaharna, 2010). According to Jan Melissen, it is this difference in the pattern of communication that fundamentally distinguishes public diplomacy from propaganda. While they are both similar in their objective to persuade, public diplomacy is “fundamentally different [...] in the sense that [it] also listens to what people have to say” (2007, p. 18).

The emergence of numerous actors involved in the process as well as the sheer volume of information, have resulted in what Herbert Simon described as the “paradox of plenty” (quoted in Nye, 2008, p. 99). Therefore, the role of public diplomacy has shifted away from merely providing information or “out-communicating” rivals, to – instead – its framing and presentation, since the latter can direct attention to certain events and information, as well as provide the context for it (Nye, 2008). Under these circumstances, credibility becomes a crucial resource, because it affects the perceived legitimacy of the public diplomacy actor and determines, to a large extent, the success of their pursued objectives (Nye, 2008). Seeing public diplomacy essentially as “a form of national image management,” Gass and Seiter (2009) suggest a multi-dimensional construct of credibility, which emphasizes audience-centric, culturally-specific, and ethical approaches. According to them, competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill – or rather, their perception by the target audience – constitutes the basis of any credible public diplomacy strategy (Gass & Seiter, 2009). Yet, they emphasize that the ultimate key lies in the actor’s ability to make the communication salient to the intended public by adapting it to their fundamental values and overall culture (Gass & Seiter, 2009).

Given its nature, public diplomacy also inevitably involves transnational and cross-cultural communication, which, in turn, implies a degree of incompatibility between the general outlook and value systems of the two sides involved (Entman, 2008). However, an actor can always make a special effort in terms of emphasizing issues that are salient for the receiving public, as well as framing those in less discordant terms (Entman, 2008; Gass & Seiter, 2009; Zaharna, 2010). Public diplomacy is, thus, a communication instrument used in governance broadly defined (Gregory, 2008). It provides the means through which political actors try to “understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance their interests and values” (Gregory, 2008, p. 276). An underlying assumption here, however, is the flexibility of the communicating actor and their willingness to adjust their communication strategies and techniques to the given circumstances.

Hence, culture can be said to constitute a core component of international communication and public diplomacy. Zaharna extends this proposition to argue that “all communication is inherently about identity,” since the selection, organization, and presentation of any communication indicates how one party sees itself, the other, and the relationship between them (Zaharna, 2010, p. 130). This view of culture and identity can then be helpful to explain differences in the approaches to and practice of public diplomacy by various international actors, including states. John Brown notes that while other governments have started to embrace “public diplomacy”, the concept – in its traditional formulation – seems to have become obsolete in the U.S., where the attention has now shifted towards “engagement”, international development and alternative ways of interacting with foreign publics (J. Brown, 2010). What is more, he says that despite other states’ recognition of the significance of the “digital age”, much of their techniques and strategies appear to be “an unoriginal replica of USIA programs during the Cold War” (J. Brown, 2010). Yet, Zaharna (2010) suggests that exploring the culture and identity of these actors remains important, as it can help understand their worldviews and their perceived role in global affairs, which, in turn, can provide a better insight into the idiosyncrasies of their approach to public diplomacy.

### *Culture and Identity*

In analyzing the political, social, and cultural formulations of public diplomacy, it is important to pay special attention to the social constructivist approach, according to which individual state interests and strategies are established based on the historical, political and cultural contexts – domestic and international – within which the state operates (Katzenstein, 1996b). Jutta Weldes suggests that this context, which also creates the national interest, “emerges out of a process of representation through which state officials (among others) make sense of both their domestic and international contexts” (Weldes, 1999, p. 4). Negative self-images tend to emerge from “perceived disregard or humiliation by other states”, and since such images cannot be tolerated for long, states “will compensate by self-assertion and/or devaluation and aggression toward the Other” (Wendt, 1999, pp. 236-237). On the other hand, Wendt notes that positive self-images emerge from mutual respect and cooperation, as well as the recognition of sovereignty by other states, thus reducing “the need to secure the Self by devaluing or destroying the Other,” and reassuring it not only against the physical threat of conquest, “but also against

the psychic threat of not having standing” (1999, p. 237). Thus, how the state perceives itself has a direct impact on its international behavior, which, in turn, leads to the interpretation of this behavior by other actors in the international environment.

Andrei Tsygankov argues that both internal and situational factors of national identity – which ultimately shapes the national interests – are important. He stresses that local conditions such as “the state of the economy, relations among different social groups, or the type of the political regime” should not be ignored, since they are just as important in shaping national perceptions as the “significant Other” who establishes the meaningful context for the actor’s existence and development (Tsygankov, 2010). Hence, he argues, “some local concerns are more historically stable and are formed across a relatively long time, while others are more immediate and emerge in response to short-term developments” (Tsygankov, 2010, p. 16). With distinct social conditions in place, therefore, nations have distinct concerns and view the world through their own “cultural lenses” (Tsygankov, 2010). These views and perceptions, in their turn, can affect not only the formulation and conduct of foreign policy, but also the communication style – i.e. the public diplomacy – of the actor.

These theories are particularly true at times of change, when the elites, as well as the other members of the national “group” have to reconstruct their identities and reformulate their national interests, accordingly (Clunan, 2009; Tsygankov, 2010). Russia, a Eurasian empire and then a world superpower throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, experienced great humiliation and chaos in the early days of its new statehood in the 1990s. Therefore, it makes a good case study, since one can explore how the country went through this process after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and identify historical continuities and changes in the political discourse on – and the actual approach to – foreign policy. Furthermore, the recent lack of interest and the dearth of in-depth academic analysis of Russia’s foreign policy, particularly over the past decade, have left a major gap in the literature. This is especially true about Russia’s approach to the increasingly fashionable objectives of public diplomacy and soft power.

Given the limited scope of this research, however, the paper relies on existing literature to identify the central themes in Russian foreign policy outlook. It then outlines the major trends in the Russian approach to public diplomacy, identified through inductive reading of a wide range of major relevant documents, official statements and academic literature. This research relies mostly on electronic sources available online, using major search engines for public diplomacy

and related terms – such as “cultural diplomacy”, “soft power”, or “network diplomacy” – in Russian.

### **Russian Foreign Policy**

Russia is a country with centuries of authoritarian past, which inevitably affects its strategic culture and foreign policy outlook, and consequently, its political-institutional structure as well as key decision-makers. What is more, given the multiple transformations in the nature of the Russian state and the fundamental changes in the international system, its self-image and corresponding perception by the international community have transformed significantly as well. However, the formation of these images and perceptions on both sides are greatly affected by historical inertia and, as discussed above, by the contextual factors that form not only the perception of the image, but also its projection. This case is especially important, since almost every analysis of Russia – whether of its domestic or foreign policies – has been gravely distorted and misunderstood in the West (Marshall, 2011; Tsygankov, 2009, 2010).

As Thomas Graham notes, historically, it was the political system of Russia that served as a major source of its power: the authoritarian political culture, centralization, and limited freedoms (Graham, 2010, p. 116). The distrust of its own people led to a very weak “civil society” base, with a major divide between rulers and the ruled (Graham, 2010). Another persistent historical trend is Russia’s indecisiveness about its international orientation, with continuous internal arguments about the regional priorities and aspirations of the country (Clunan, 2009; Marshall, 2011; Tsygankov, 2010). Tsygankov suggests that at least since Peter the Great (late 17<sup>th</sup>-early 18<sup>th</sup> Century), the West – whether seen just in terms of Europe or including the U.S. – has represented “a superior civilization whose influences were to be emulated or contained, but never ignored” (Tsygankov, 2010, p. 2). Thus, Russia’s national identity, as well as its foreign policy, has over centuries been strongly influenced by Russian rulers’ perceptions about the West’s view of Russia, its legitimacy and its international behavior (Clunan, 2009; Feklyunina, 2008, 2010; Neumann, 1996; Tsygankov, 2010).

Yet, there is a lot of indecisiveness and confusion among the Russians and their leaders regarding their “national identity” and orientation. The political and identity chaos that Russia went through in the 1990s was, perhaps, the ideal illustration of this indecisiveness (Clunan, 2009; Graham, 2010; Marshall, 2011; Tsygankov, 2010). Even after the significant improvement

in Russia's domestic situation as well as its international standing in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is often obvious that "Russia's fundamental identity [...] remains ill defined" (Mankoff, 2009, p. 21), while its foreign policy "continues to exhibit strong, undeniable underlying traits of an ongoing identity crisis" (Marshall, 2011, p. 183). Despite this persistent problem, the academic literature mostly agrees that Russia has managed to outline general foreign policy objectives for itself, which – although very broad – provide an overall strategic orientation (Clunan, 2009; Marshall, 2011; Oliker, et al., 2009; Tsygankov, 2010). Olga Oliker et al. suggest that Russia's foreign policy is driven by two major goals:

The first of these goals is to cement and strengthen Russia's economic resurgence in order to keep growth at home on track. The second is to ensure that Russia can attain and sustain the international prestige that will enable it to (1) defend and pursue its interests into the future and (2) maintain the security and growth that it has enjoyed in recent years. (2009, pp. 5-6)

Ultimately, despite the disagreements and the ideological divides not just among the larger population, but more importantly, among the leading elites, there is a general agreement that in one way or another Russia needs to reinstate and maintain its status as a Great Power in international affairs (Concept, 2008; Mankoff, 2009; Oliker, et al., 2009).

This aspiration is inextricably linked to Russia's "modernization" drive, since it is seen as the tool with the help of which Russia can enhance its domestic strength, as well as gain international recognition (Clunan, 2009). To use Thomas Carothers' formulation: "Poor countries develop. Powerful countries modernize" (Carnegie, 2011). As Tsygankov (2010) points out, modernization has been a priority objective for Russian rulers for centuries, and remained as such throughout the Soviet as well as the post-Soviet era. The "Modernization" approach reemerged in a new light under President Medvedev who, since 2009, had made it the official domestic *and* foreign policy priority for Russia (Graham, 2010; Mankoff, 2009; Medvedev, 2009a, 2009b). The "Great Power" status also relates to the increasingly pronounced desire for acceptance of Russia's sovereignty and position as an influential international actor with its own self-interests to protect, both domestically and abroad (Concept, 2008; Filimonov, 2010; Mankoff, 2009; Medvedev, 2008; Putin, 2005, 2007; Tsygankov, 2010).

And yet, as Jeffrey Mankoff points out, "at times it seems that Russia is more interested in gaining recognition of its special responsibility than in using that responsibility to present constructive solutions to a given problem" (2009, p. 42). Hence, given this prioritization of

international status and recognition, the lack thereof has not only posed a major problem for the leadership, but also has – more importantly – had a negative impact on the self-image held by Russians, increasing the potential for greater “self-assertion and/or devaluation and aggression toward the [significant] Other” (Wendt, 1999, p. 237). It is this combination of factors that gradually lead to the realization of the importance of the role that public diplomacy can play in enhancing Russia’s international standing not just politically, but also economically and culturally. The following section will examine the conceptualization of public diplomacy by Russian scholars and officials and will provide an analysis of the major themes and objectives that emerge in the discourse.

### *Russian views of Public Diplomacy*

Towards the end of the 1990s, as Russia was still struggling to define its identity, internal order, as well as its desired international status, there was also increasing concern about its rapidly deteriorating image in the world, particularly in the West (Feklyunina, 2008, 2010; Lebedenko, 2004). The new socio-political context and the economic chaos of the post-1991 period, the increasingly troubling situation in the Caucasus and, perhaps most importantly, the “contradictory image” of Boris Yeltsin – who, as the President, personified the image of state power in Russia – all fed into this persisting Russian identity crisis (Clunan, 2009; Erofeyev, 2007; Lebedenko, 2004). This confusion about the “national self” and what Russia stands for, in turn, affected the country’s projected image abroad. Furthermore, the ideological and information policy vacuum that was left by the complete withdrawal of the state “was quickly filled with commercials, soap operas, and news of crime and disasters,” which only added to foreign perceptions of anarchy and lawlessness in Russia (Lebedenko, 2004, p. 72).

By the time Vladimir Putin came to power in the early 2000s, Russia’s “image problem” had become an “urgent” issue acknowledged by several official documents and further reinforced by the President’s 2004 call to address it (Feklyunina, 2008; Kononenko, 2006; Lebedenko, 2004). The Russians felt that there was a growing mismatch between the image of their country held by the international public and what was thought to be the actual “reality” within (Feklyunina, 2008, 2010; Lebedenko, 2004). This interpretation was confirmed by a series of opinion polls and research initiatives carried out in the West, which demonstrated that Russia was primarily associated with vodka, KGB, mafia and Kalashnikov rifles (Evans, 2005; Lebedenko, 2004):

all arguably negative images for a nation by then aspiring to reinstate its “Great Power” status. More importantly, however, such a negative perception by the international community was considered to be a major hindrance not only to Russia’s closer integration with the West, but also with major international organizations, which was arguably a major foreign policy objective as well (Feklyunina, 2008; Tsygankov, 2010). The image crisis was also seen as a major economic disadvantage, scaring away the much-cherished investors and potential business partnerships, and preventing the modernization of the country (Feklyunina, 2010; Lebedenko, 2004; Medvedev, 2008, 2010a). To ameliorate its image, therefore, Kremlin started paying greater attention to public diplomacy, not only incorporating it into its major foreign policy framework, but also starting numerous initiatives and revamping the Soviet-era outreach institutions (Bigg, 2006; Erofeyev, 2007; Evans, 2005; Feklyunina, 2008, 2010).

To better understand Kremlin’s official approach to public diplomacy is it essential to look at the “Foreign Policy Concept of Russian Federation” adopted in 2000 and later revised in 2008. The document includes provisions that highlight the role of strong relationships with foreign nations and emphasize the importance of international goodwill for the achievement of Russia’s key foreign policy objectives (Concept, 2008). In December 2010, President Dmitry Medvedev signed an Addendum to the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept – “Main Policies of the Russian Federation in the Sphere of International Cultural-Humanitarian Cooperation” – which focused specifically on outlining what can be considered to be Russia’s public diplomacy priorities and methods (Addendum, 2010).

Before discussing these and other documents, however, it is important to understand the Russian definitions of the term “public diplomacy” itself. There is often a differentiation between *publichnaya diplomatiya* (public diplomacy) and *obshchestvennaya diplomatiya* (social/societal diplomacy), where the former is often defined in terms of informational initiatives undertaken by the government (Dolinskiy, 2011; Kononenko, 2006), while the latter also involves private and civil society organizations, as well as individuals (Shershnev in Govorov, 2010). It is also important to point out that sometimes the effort is also called “people’s diplomacy” (*narodnaya diplomatiya*), particularly when referring to private initiatives and direct people-to-people contacts, especially in the former Soviet region (Ogonek, 2009; Yakunin, 2006). Nevertheless, any discussion of public diplomacy – no matter the actual terminology used – sees “influencing opinions” as its ultimate objective, while also emphasizes the need to adhere to the legal and

political framework laid out by the government (see D. Rogozin, 2010; Shershnev, 2008). Thus, even if the government is not given the major role in the practice of public diplomacy, the effort is not seen as an entirely independent process from official policies and approaches.

### *Official Documents*

The Foreign Policy Concept recognizes the fundamental transformations in the global political system brought about by the processes of globalization, as well as the diversity and nature of new international actors that it has produced (Concept, 2008). Since the Concept document essentially outlines Russia's foreign policy, it is imperative that all governmental bodies and related organizations adopt the key principles and objectives included there. To enhance Russia's international standing, the document lists the promotion of "an objective image of the Russian Federation globally" as well as the promotion of the "Russian language and the Russian peoples' culture" among the top objectives of Russia's foreign policy. Despite including a clear statement recognizing the importance of relations with various states and regions of the world, the major emphasis falls on various programs and initiatives that help bring about a closer economic as well as socio-cultural integration among CIS members (Concept, 2008).

The pertinent section for public diplomacy is the specific provision in the document that focuses on the "Information support for foreign policy activities" by the Russian Federation (Concept, 2008). Included in the list of the "top priorities of Russian Foreign Policy," the provision states:

An important part of the foreign policy activities of the Russian Federation is communicating to the broad world public full and accurate information about its stance on major international issues, foreign policy initiatives and actions [...], [about] its domestic social and economic development processes and plans, as well as the accomplishments of Russian culture and science. [...] In public diplomacy, Russia will seek its objective perception in the world, develop its own effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad [and] strengthen the role of the Russian mass media in the international information environment providing them with essential state support. [...] [Russia will also] actively participate in international information cooperation and take all necessary measures to repel information threats to its sovereignty and security. (Concept, 2008)

Therefore, the "informational approach" is defined as one of the fundamental aspects in Russia's foreign policy, constituting the core of its public diplomacy and accompanying all international activities.

The informational element is highlighted in the 2010 Addendum, too, although the latter focused primarily on outlining priorities and plans related to cultural and educational activities (Addendum, 2010). It is important to note, however, that despite all the importance ascribed to the role of the media in promoting Russian public diplomacy, the Addendum seems to be mostly ignoring the current significance of the Internet, mentioning it just once and failing to outline any web-related and digital outreach programs or objectives.

The Addendum puts special emphasis on “international cultural-humanitarian cooperation,” which includes ties in arts and culture, science and education, mass media, youth exchanges, sports and tourism, as well as publishing- and museum-related activities. Hence, although the document refers to “public diplomacy” when discussing transnational relationships between various civil society groups, it mostly focuses on “cultural-humanitarian cooperation” as the major alternative to traditional diplomacy (Addendum, 2010).

The most interesting principle in the Addendum, however, is the attempted emphasis on “dialogue” and mutuality of any communication outlined in the document. There is repeated mention of “openness” and “receptivity” of the Russian culture, and of the need by the Russian people to stay informed and knowledgeable about the culture, values and achievements of other nations (Addendum, 2010). Yet, the document states that this is important not just for the sake of genuine interest in others, but also for the purposes of creating a “global reputation of Russia as a democratic state that is open to other cultures.” The “openness” claim is further undercut by a later passage that states: “It is obvious that a greater emphasis should be put on the export of Russian culture and its popularization abroad, rather than on the import of foreign culture into Russia” (Addendum, 2010).

These documents lay the foundations of strategy and practice of public diplomacy in Russia, also reflecting – to a degree – the general political and academic discourse on the subject. In turn, they also serve as an underlying framework as well as points of reference for any further theorizing and formal discussion of public diplomacy. What follows is a discussion of the major themes in public diplomacy, related concepts and their constituent elements, which emerge in the academic literature as well as in key statements on the subject by high-ranking Russian officials throughout the past decade.

## **Major Themes**

*Public diplomacy in terms of “soft power” and influence:* Joseph Nye’s concept of soft power has proven very popular among Russian scholars and officials, who often tend to see it as the ultimate objective to be achieved through public diplomacy (Dolinskiy, 2010; Federal Council, 2010; Filimonov, 2010; Shershnev in Govorov, 2010; Kononenko, 2006; Lavrov, 2007; A. Rogozin, 2008; D. Rogozin, 2010; Solovyev, 2010). As discussed above, the two key policy documents on Russian public diplomacy – the Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 and its 2010 Addendum – openly refer to public diplomacy as a means for cultivating Russian influence around the world. Many of the scholars seem to agree on that public diplomacy is essentially a tool for the ultimate objective of soft power and enhanced international influence (Kononenko, 2006; Dolinskiy, 2010; Filimonov, 2010; Solovyev, 2010). There is also an evident general assumption that merely increasing initiatives in the field of public diplomacy (or soft power) will automatically lead to greater influence. However, any exploration of tools for cultivating legitimacy and credibility – that are, as discussed earlier, the fundamental requirements for effective soft power – are missing, leaving the general discussion limited to an overall framework of influence through essentially a one-way, informational approach.

*Importance of “explaining Russia”:* Another fundamental assumption in the discussions about public diplomacy is that the root cause for negative perception of Russia is either the lack of appropriate and/or sufficient information abroad about the country and its people, or is a deliberate attempt by Western media and officials to tarnish the image of Russia (Concept, 2008; Feklyunina, 2010; Kononenko, 2006; Lozansky, 2008; Panarin, 2004a; Rukavishnikov, 2004). In the case of the former, the perceived weakness seems to be coming from Russia’s lack of voice in the international sphere. The objectives outlined in the 2008 Concept document and its 2010 Addendum reflect this recognition as they propose to spread more information and greater knowledge about Russia around the world (Addendum, 2010; Concept, 2008). Yet, as Kononenko (2006) and Solovyev (2010), as well as the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept document articulate, the informational approach is important not only for explaining or corroborating certain policy choices, but also in presenting Russia’s achievements, Russian culture and especially, the Russian language abroad.

Countering the negative image of Russia that is purposely advanced in the West is another public diplomacy priority identified by scholars and echoed in the two major policy documents.

Vladimir Rukavishnikov (2004) suggests that the formation of negative perceptions of Russia in America is not limited to self-perpetuating stereotypes in the American popular culture or to statements made by prominent political figures. According to him, American mass media themselves are biased against Russia and therefore, cannot present truthful and credible information about the country. Tsygankov has even written a book – *Russophobia* – where, beyond the exploration of the activities of the anti-Russian lobby in the U.S., he also criticizes the “manipulative” American media for allowing the “politically minded elites [to shape] views of a poorly informed public” (2009, p. 43). This process is further fuelled by various oppositional forces that are active in the West – such as Gary Kasparov or Pavel Khodorkovsky (the son of the jailed former oil tycoon, Mikhail Khodorkovsky) – who gain access and attention in the West unparalleled to that of the Russian officials or representatives (Feklyunina, 2010; Tsygankov, 2009). Hence, their often anti-Russian narrative wins in the Western mass media, while the official Russian perspective either gets lost in translation or is discarded due to perceived lack of truthfulness and credibility (Feklyunina, 2010; Lozansky, 2008).

Thus, the core problem is seen to be not in the country or its policies, but rather in the misunderstanding of Russia’s image and projected identity (Feklyunina, 2008, 2010; Kononenko, 2006; Rukavishnikov, 2004). Such an “image-heavy” perspective on the issue, then, implies that by beaming more information this “misperception of Russia” can be corrected. Perhaps the most telling position in this regard is that of Erast Galumov, professor at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, who suggests that Russia’s image can be improved without any significant changes in the country itself since “image is not reality, but only the reflection of reality that can be made positive” (quoted in Feklyunina, 2008, p. 606).

*Cultural and Educational programs:* Coupled with the informational approach, cultural and educational initiatives constitute some of the fundamental bases of Russian conceptualization of public diplomacy. Highlighted in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, the goal to promote the Russian language and culture lies at the core of such initiatives as the Russian World Foundation or *Rossotrudnichestvo*. These organizations maintain a network of cultural and educational centers abroad, organize and host various cultural events and festivals, and act as mediators in attracting Russians living abroad as well as foreign students for study in Russia (Feklyunina, 2010; Filimonov, 2010; Rossotrudnichestvo, 2010). As already discussed, the 2010 Addendum

to the Foreign Policy Concept identifies culture and cultural diplomacy – writ large – as fundamental bases of public diplomacy. Within that framework, “cultural diplomacy” spans a wide range of various activities, including the promotion of the Russian language, production and promotion of Russian arts, high and popular culture, education and sports (Addendum, 2010). The cultural export approach was reinforced by the *Russian Foreign Ministry Guidelines for the Development of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries*, which outlined two major lines of action: promotion of high culture and high art as easily recognizable Russian cultural products, and a wider production and export of mass culture that demonstrates authentic Russian attributes (Filimonov, 2010). The document, however, focuses solely on the production and export of cultural products, thus providing a general guideline specifically dealing with the aspiration to capture a greater share in the global sphere of popular and high “arts.”

Overall, there seems to be a general agreement on the great importance of cultural and, especially, educational exchanges and experiences that help to cultivate productive long-term relationships with representatives of foreign nations, as well as create a lasting positive image of Russia. Providing educational experiences for current and future leaders, journalists and cultural figures is seen as essential for ensuring long-lasting good-will for Russia around the world (Kononenko, 2006; Nikonov, 2006; Solovyev, 2010).

The desire to reestablish, reinforce and build upon already existing and deeply held historical ties with the former Soviet are inevitably interrelated with the primary focus of the Russian foreign policy on the CIS (Concept, 2008). This focus is emphasized in the major foreign policy documents, in statements made by officials, the academic literature, as well as in the actual implementation of various cultural and educational programs, most of which are concentrated in the former Socialist/Communist region (Addendum, 2010; Concept, 2008; Feklyunina, 2010; Hill, 2006; Lavrov, 2010; Medvedev, 2008, 2009a, 2010a; Putin, 2005, 2007). Most notably, in his Annual Address to the Federal Assembly in 2005, Putin stated that Russia should continue its “civilizing mission” on the Eurasian continent (2005). Russia has major interests in the region and it can capitalize on this existing bond and emphasis on further “CIS integration” to achieve its objectives in foreign policy, and public diplomacy in particular (Medvedev, 2010b; Solovyev, 2010).

*“Modernization,” civil society and “humanitarian relationships”*: In September 2009,

President Medvedev published an article highlighting his vision for the modernization of Russia, which he saw as the fundamental driving force not only behind the socio-economic development of the country, but also behind its much-needed political and cultural transformation (Medvedev, 2009b). Later that year, addressing the Federal Assembly, he noted that modernization is key in Russia's foreign policy, too, since it can help build closer transnational ties between publics (Medvedev, 2009a). In a speech in late 2010, Foreign Minister Lavrov also highlighted the role that cooperation and civil society dialogue in the field of technological innovations play in improving the international context for Russia's foreign policy conduct (Lavrov, 2010). In that speech he also acknowledged the importance of new non-state actors in the international sphere (Lavrov, 2010), mirroring the broader discussion in the literature (see Dolinskiy, 2010; Filimonov, 2010; Govorov, 2010; Lebedenko, 2004; Nikonov, 2006; Panarin, 2004b; Solovyev, 2010; Sukharev & Korenkov, 2008).

International humanitarian and civil society cooperation are often conceptualized as fundamental factors in Russia's public diplomacy and improved image abroad. As already mentioned, the humanitarian element lies at the core of the differentiation between "public" and "social" or "people's" diplomacy, where the latter is said to rely on non-state actors – local administrations, NGOs as well as private commercial organizations – that establish relationships without the direct involvement of the national government (Shershnev in Govorov, 2010; Kosobokova, 2006; Sukharev & Korenkov, 2008). Nonetheless, phrases such as "humanitarian cooperation," "civil society cooperation," "citizen diplomacy," "development aid" and "integration" are often used together with "public diplomacy" and "soft power," thus blurring the line between these various concepts, their ultimate objectives as well as the major players associated with each of them (Addendum, 2010; Concept, 2008; Federal Council, 2010; Govorov, 2010; Lavrov, 2010; Medvedev, 2009a, 2010b; Rossotrudnichestvo, 2010; Sukharev & Korenkov, 2008). For example, Modest Kolerov, former head of the Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries at the Administration of the President, said in 2006 that costs involved in citizen diplomacy should be covered by the civil society organizations themselves, since receiving financial support from other bodies and/or organizations would mean that they are pursuing the latter's interests (quoted in Kosobokova, 2006). And yet, the 2010 Addendum to the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation clearly designates official governmental bodies as primary actors establishing and maintaining

Russia's foreign cultural, civil-society and humanitarian relationships. What is more, conceptualizing and implementing these elements of public diplomacy together with Kremlin's International Development Assistance program (Medvedev, 2010b) implies direct connection and perhaps even interdependence among those, further clouding the differences between terms, actors and responsibilities.

*Economic Diplomacy:* This discussion is distinct from the previous one, since its objective is not the utilization of certain economic initiatives for the purposes of public diplomacy, but rather the opposite: using public diplomacy to improve the image of Russia, so as to be able to help Russia's economic growth by attracting foreign investment and helping Russian companies abroad (Feklyunina, 2008, 2010; Lebedenko, 2004; Medvedev, 2010a; Panarin, 2004b). As already discussed, the impact of Russia's negative international image on foreign direct investment is one of the greatest concerns of the Russian leadership, and is seen as an issue that is inextricably linked to Russia's public diplomacy priorities (Addendum, 2010; Medvedev, 2010b; Shokhin, 2010; Solovyev, 2010). President Medvedev has been especially vocal about this issue, highlighting the importance of "modernization" (Medvedev, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a) and focusing on the significance of "economic diplomacy" in his 2010 Address to the Federal Assembly. Foreign investment is also seen as interrelated with the modernization and innovation objectives, resulting in an interlinked cycle of image, public diplomacy, modernization and growth (Addendum, 2010; Medvedev, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b).

Nevertheless, public diplomacy is also seen as a key facilitator of favorable markets for Russian goods, the success of which can further feed into the modernization process launched by the government (Medvedev, 2010b; Shokhin, 2010; Solovyev, 2010). President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Alexander Shokhin (2010) states that it is important to "create conditions of foreign economic assistance in a bid to modernize the economy and make it more reliant on innovation," while Eduard Solovyev (2010) suggests to facilitate economic growth and market development in foreign countries (with a special focus on the CIS region), since it would inevitably result in indirect economic gains for Russia, too. Furthermore, President Medvedev suggests that Russia's improved image and international standing, particularly in terms of economic indicators, will bring about closer economic and technical cooperation with other countries, bringing in experience and know-how, as well as helping to

promote Russian products abroad (Medvedev, 2010b). Hence, although the official and academic discourse on the subject does not clearly specify which of the two factors – positive image or substantive investment – comes first in the relationship, it does recognize that they are closely interrelated.

*Spiritual Diplomacy:* Scholars like Shershnev (in Govorov, 2010) and Igor Panarin (2004b) define spiritual diplomacy as a separate component within the greater framework of national diplomacy. The Russian Orthodox Church – the largest and historically the most influential in the country – is seen as playing the most prominent role in carrying out public diplomacy activities within the religious realms of international affairs. The 2010 Addendum to the Foreign Policy Concept pays special attention to the importance of the “religious dimension in intercultural dialogue” and states that “the culture of peace belongs to the Church.”

The Church is seen as already having a close relationship with its dioceses and branches abroad, while it also holds deep historical ties with representatives of other faiths and Christian denominations from around the world (Addendum, 2010; Govorov, 2010; Patriarch, 2009; RIAN, 2009; Zolotov, 2010). Furthermore, religion is seen as a vehicle to promote the Russian culture, values and “civilization” abroad (Addendum, 2010; Patriarch, 2009; Zolotov, 2011). To quote Hegumen Filipp Ryabykh, thanks to the Orthodox Church “a historic, civilizational community has been formed that shares certain values [...] as well as symbols and symbolic acts associated with the specific experience of these values” (in Zolotov, 2011). He suggests that this symbolic universe, shared across borders, can serve a foundation for further relationship-building and international understanding (Zolotov, 2011). For example, in 2010 the Russian Orthodox Church was the only national institution still maintaining formal ties with Georgia, after the diplomatic fallout that followed the summer 2008 war (Zolotov, 2010). Lastly, the Russian Orthodox Church is one of the major institutions that helps maintain the contacts and relationships with Russian and Russian-speaking communities abroad, and establishing these relationships where they are absent (Patriarch, 2009; Zolotov, 2010, 2011).

*Mobilization of and relationships with the Russian and Russian-speaking communities abroad:* A persistent theme that runs through all these various discussions and conceptualizations is the importance of reaching out to the ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking publics living

abroad. The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept specifically highlights the need to protect the interests of and cultivate closer ties with the Russian communities abroad, while various bodies within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as affiliated organizations such as the Russian World Foundation, *Rossotrudnichestvo* or even *RIA Novosti* have created various programs and special partnerships targeting diasporic communities (Feklyunina, 2008, 2010; Filimonov, 2010; RIAN, 2009; Rossotrudnichestvo, 2010). Although there is recognition of the role that diasporic communities living within Russia can play in enhancing the objectives of Russian public diplomacy in their respective home countries (Nikonov, 2006), the greatest emphasis is usually put on Russian communities abroad, particularly those living in the CIS region. Olga Batanova (2009) suggests that according to 2007 data, there are 30 million people living abroad who consider themselves Russian and who form the basis of “the Russian World”: “a certain socio-cultural reality [...] based on the Russian language, the Russian culture, and a sense of association with Russia.” Russian officials and scholars believe that these communities can serve as a strong intellectual, political and social resource, and act as “a tool for realizing Russia’s external and internal goals and solving its problems and tasks” (Batanova, 2009).

These designs, therefore, mostly focus on the creation and maintenance of Russian schools and cultural centers abroad, attempts to recruit Russians and Russian-speakers living abroad to Russian educational institutions, and the encouragement of these communities to maintain their Russian language and traditions (Addendum, 2010; Batanova, 2009; Rossotrudnichestvo, 2010). And despite various attempts to bring Russians abroad together or to encourage them to come to Russia itself for various conferences and gatherings (Batanova, 2009), the major emphasis is put on the communities themselves and not on the facilitation of their role in Russia’s public diplomacy. There is no discussion of how to connect with *foreign* publics through Russian expatriate communities in order to enhance Russian foreign policy interests; instead, the primary emphasis is on connecting and reconnecting with the existing communities (see Addendum, 2010; RIAN, 2009). Therefore, the overall discussion is missing the opportunity of utilizing diaspora’s potential to its full, discarding the “facilitation” role altogether.

#### *Major issues and limitations*

The above discussion has incorporated some of the more specific issues in the official and academic Russian discourse on public diplomacy. However, several overarching problems and

assumptions underlying this broad discourse also merit attention. Perhaps the most notable issue is the historical inertia, both in the formulation as well as the attitude toward public diplomacy. The heavy reliance on informational approach as well as the prioritization of the government's role in the conduct and formulation of public diplomacy (even when it comes to "societal diplomacy") reflects Russia's heavily centralized and top-down political culture. Despite all the talk of encouraging civil society activism and "humanitarian cooperation," it seems the Kremlin does not trust its own people enough to truly embrace openness and facilitate an independent transnational dialogue among societies. What is more, formulations such as "people's diplomacy" are perhaps all too indicative of the influence that Russia's communist past might still have on the thinking in its political and academic circles.

The second major issue is the attempted import of concepts developed in the West into the Russian context. The adoption of "soft power" as an important foreign policy objective is a good illustration of this problem. Nye's concept was developed particularly for the case of the U.S. and is based on the idiosyncrasies of the American socio-political system where numerous civic and private organizations, independent media as well as global cultural and political appeal play an important role. Most importantly, as discussed before, the concept of soft power can, in many ways, be seen as a justification for America's already existing hegemony around the world, and not a source of credibility or acceptance. Therefore, it is very questionable as to whether the objective of enhanced global soft power can be achieved by Russia under the current global circumstances and in the context of the Russian culture and its socio-political heritage.

Arguably, the very concept of "public diplomacy," which originated and was developed in the West will prove incompatible with the Russian context that has demonstrated persisting tendencies towards authoritarianism and lack of participant civic culture. The direct adaptation of Western "fashionable" discourse can thus be misleading, demonstrating either a misunderstanding of the essence of key concepts or resistance to truly embrace them despite all the rhetoric.

Lastly, there is clearly a lack of strategic orientation and consensus on what the objectives, techniques, and strategies of the Russian public diplomacy should be. Directly tied to the problem of identity crisis and the lack of clarity in foreign policy priorities, the conceptualization and views on Russian public diplomacy seem to be flopping around indecisively, often reminiscent of Russia's socio-political heritage but also clearly demonstrating attempts to adopt

the Western discourse and integrate it into the local context. Furthermore, the very orientation of Russia's foreign policy – West, East, or “the near abroad” (i.e. the former Soviet bloc) – is unclear, which certainly affects the public diplomacy priorities as well. Since the aspiration for a “Great Power” status is perhaps one of the very few objectives on which there is a consensus, the attainment of successful public diplomacy and soft power is indispensable for Russia, especially in the West where it desires recognition. However, given Russia's historical lack of credibility and legitimacy – or, arguably, its lack of hegemony – in the West, simply relying on American-specific “soft power” objectives might be insufficient for success outside of the CIS. Nevertheless, given Russia's existing “hard power” in the CIS region – whether in terms of its military or economic muscle (Hill, 2006; Oliker, et al., 2009; Tsygankov, 2006) – as well as its historical affinity and cultural influence, Russia's current public diplomacy approach might be much more applicable to its immediate neighborhood. Yet, arguably, Russian public diplomacy objectives are not limited to the region, and therefore, if the country intends to win over the hearts and minds of the public in the West, it needs to thoroughly change and reform its approach to the issue.

## **Russian Public Diplomacy in the U.S.**

### *The Problem*

The perception of Russia in the West has been subject to great fluctuations throughout history. According to Bruno Naarden and Joep Leerssen, over the centuries the West has constructed a very dynamic and “layered” image of Russia that fluctuates between “oriental despotism” and that of a progressive Western-looking nation (2007, p. 228). They suggest that these fluctuations in the “Western mind” run parallel to historical periods: at times of perceived Russian weakness, or when its rulers and major cultural “creators” were more “Westward-looking,” Russia was perceived as more progressive and civilized; the opposite was true at times of emerging Russian power and its attempts to extend influence and assert authority on the international arena (Naarden & Leerssen, 2007). A similar explanation is echoed by Rukavishnikov (2004), who tracks the “zigzags” of the American public perception of Russia throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and suggests that they mirror the state of the official political relationships between the two countries.

Other research on public opinion dating back to the Cold War period has demonstrated

that Americans were mostly hostile to the Eastern bloc countries, not only because the Soviet Union was considered to be the prime national security threat to the U.S., but also because it “symbolized the antithesis of cherished core values, including political and religious freedom and what might simply be termed an ‘American way of life’” (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1989, p. 8). Tsygankov (2009) further posits that there is a degree of institutionalized “Russophobia” in the U.S., the reasons for which are not limited to Russia’s domestic political culture or foreign policy ambitions, but also include American exceptionalism, global hegemonic tendencies, as well as persistent efforts by certain political and social groups – which he calls the “anti-Russian lobby” – to promote an anti-Russian sentiment in the country. According to him, these sentiments are then reproduced and perpetuated in the popular culture in the U.S., as well as by the policy community and a biased media (Tsygankov, 2009).

Recent poll data on the public opinion and perceptions of Russia are telling in this regard. For example, the Pew Research Center has found that 32% of Americans had an unfavorable view of Russia (Pew, 2010) and 61% considered Russia to be “a serious problem” (Pew, 2009). Other polls indicate that 49% of Americans thought of Russia as an “adversary” (NBC/WSJ, 2009), 64% said it has a “mainly negative” influence in the world (WPO, 2009), while 40% thought that Russia would not live up to its share of the agreement if the New START treaty were ratified (CNN/ORC, 2010). In a 2010 poll, 33% of the respondents said they consider Russia “unfriendly” towards the United States (Economist/YouGov, 2010), while 45% said Russia is “somewhere in between” an ally and an enemy (Rasmussen, 2010). Lastly, in February 2011, 49% of the American public said they were “not too/not at all interested” in Russia-related news (Pew, 2011).

This context, therefore, sets the stage for inherent questioning of Russian actions or any of its attempts at communication with the American public. Given the problem of information overload and the “paradox of plenty,” perhaps the greatest concern in this regard is selective processing based on the need to avoid cognitive dissonance (Manjoo, 2008; Sunstein, 2001). Hence, even if the public pays attention to Russia-related information – whether in media or through specific events – which in itself may be very unlikely given the discussion above, there is a high chance for that information to be misinterpreted. What is worse, to avoid cognitive dissonance, the American public might use that very information to support an already biased perception of Russia, reinforced by the cultural and informational context within the country.

This, therefore, further stresses the problem of the lack of credibility in Russia's attempts at public diplomacy or soft power projection in the United States, emphasizing the need to adopt non-traditional and alternative communication methods that would be both culturally sensitive and cognitively acceptable for the local public. However, the fact that there has not been significant improvement over time – despite the increased attempts on various public diplomacy fronts by the Russian Federation – indicates a faulty approach by the Russians.

### *Cultural Diplomacy and Exchanges*

Cull defines cultural and exchange diplomacy as an actor's attempt to manage the international environment through publicizing its cultural resources and achievements, facilitating cultural transmission abroad, as well as reciprocal exchange of citizens for a period of study and/or acculturation (2009, pp. 19-20). Although he differentiates between these components of public diplomacy, Cull emphasizes that there is a lot of overlap between the two and indicates that both involve an element of mutual exposure and adaptation, ideally leading to attitudinal transformation on both sides. Given the global prominence of Russian culture, the government has made a special effort to maintain that prominence and enhance it further (Compendium, 2011). However, these attempts have been met with very little success, particularly in the West.

In 2007 the government created the Russian World Foundation (*Russkiy Mir*), tasked with the promotion of “understanding and peace in the world by supporting, enhancing and encouraging the appreciation of Russian language, heritage and culture” (RusskiyMir, 2011a). A joint project by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science, *Russkiy Mir* is primarily tasked with supporting the Russian Centers which provide informational resources, educational programs, organize cultural events, and promote Russia's “intercultural communication” abroad (RusskiyMir, 2011b). *Rossotrudnichestvo* – the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation – was established in 2008, as another major organization mostly involved on the direct executive side of this effort. It maintains a sizeable network of Russian Science and Culture Centers abroad (in 2009, there were 53 Centers and 26 *Rossotrudnichestvo* offices operating in 72 countries), organizes arts and cultural programs, as well as various music and film festivals (Compendium, 2011).

However, both these organizations are primarily targeting Russians living abroad with the objective of reconnecting with them and maintaining the Russian global community, and are clearly focusing their efforts on the CIS member countries. For example, *Rossotrudnichestvo* and the Ministry of Education have drawn up a strategic plan – “Russian Language (2011-2015)” – whose primary objectives are to support of Russian-language instruction in CIS countries and to meet the language demands of diasporic communities in respective CIS member states (Rossotrudnichestvo, 2010). Hence, although *Rossotrudnichestvo* organizes language training programs at various levels and for various audiences around the world, the 2010 report indicates that Americans comprise only 3% of participants in these programs (Rossotrudnichestvo, 2010).

There are two Russian Centers in the U.S.: one in Washington, D.C. and the other in New York City, which is home to the largest Russian and Russian-speaking community in the country (Rossotrudnichestvo, 2011c). The current Russian Cultural Center in Washington, opened in 1999, hosts various cultural events, houses a library with more than 2,000 titles and hundreds of video and audio materials, offers language learning classes and organizes various discussion groups (Rossotrudnichestvo, 2011b). The satellite “Representation” in New York City provides language learning opportunities, too, but primarily serves to maintain and promote networking with the local Russian and Russian-speaking communities (Rossotrudnichestvo, 2011a). Despite the presence, however, the effectiveness and prominence of these centers is questionable. For example, the Washington, D.C. center does not organize cultural events or exhibitions itself, but rather hosts those initiated by others (RCC, 2010). Furthermore, the Center does not produce any informational material or brochures and has very little visibility, particularly outside of the capital. Most importantly, however, the local staff has very limited English-language skills, while contacting the Center has proven to be very difficult. Given its mission and the objective of communicating with and promoting the Russian culture among the larger American public, the activities of the Center can be said to have had very little success so far.

In terms of educational exchanges, Russia has been making a special effort to attract foreign students to study in its higher education institutions, too (MES, 2011b). For example, the government has instituted certain nation-wide scholarship programs and target quotas for foreigners and has tasked the Cultural Centers to recruit foreign students by providing information about various universities and administering standardized language tests (MES, 2011a). However, Russian educational institutions do not provide instruction in foreign

languages, and a certain level of Russian proficiency is required for the participation in these programs. What is more, there is no information available on the accreditation, or its international equivalents, of various educational institutions in Russia or about any established inter-institutional cooperation programs with foreign universities. These shortcomings, therefore, might strongly discourage interest in Russia as a short-term study abroad destination, particularly for American students. Lastly, there are no institutionalized prominent educational or cultural exchange programs that would attract interest from the American public, as most of the initiatives are either directed at the immediate, former-Soviet region, or target the Russian communities abroad (including that in the U.S.) (RIAN, 2009).

### *International Broadcasting*

International broadcasting comprises an actor's "attempt to manage the international environment by using the technologies of radio, television and Internet to engage with foreign publics" (Cull, 2009, p. 21). Cull suggests that the provision of news has been the "most potent element of international broadcasting", since it not only provides information about the actor but also reflects its domestic political and media culture (2009, p. 21).

The Kremlin's most prominent broadcasting project in the US is, arguably, the Russia Today (RT) TV network, launched in 2005 and broadcasting to around 100 countries from its studios in Moscow and Washington D.C. The network offers 24/7 programming in English, Arabic and, most recently, Spanish (RT, 2011), while also carrying out monitoring of the coverage of Russia in foreign media.<sup>1</sup> On its Corporate Profile webpage RT claims to be among the most popular foreign news services in the Washington D.C. area, and boasts around 200 million pay-TV subscribers around the world (RT, 2011). Interspersed with frequent news reports, RT airs one-on-one interviews with prominent individuals ("Spotlight", "RT Interview"), discussion and debate shows on controversial topics ("CrossTalk", "The Alyona Show"), and various other programs highlighting – with a special twist – the various aspects of current Russian life and achievements ("Moscow Out," "XL Reports," "Technology Update"). On its website, RT also provides various related services and resources, such as free video materials for foreign news organizations,<sup>2</sup> a virtual Russian language course for beginners,<sup>3</sup> online encyclopedias on all

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<sup>1</sup> See "InoTV": <<http://inotv.rt.com>>

<sup>2</sup> See "Free Video": <<http://freevideo.rt.com>>

<sup>3</sup> See "Learn Russian": <<http://rt.com/learn-russian/online-course-for-beginners>>

things Russian,<sup>4</sup> and a dating site.<sup>5</sup>

These efforts also involve a strong web-based component: RT can be streamed online for free;<sup>6</sup> it is active on social networking websites, with its own pages on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and *V Kontakte* (the Russian equivalent of Facebook); and both, RT and RT America have their own YouTube Channels<sup>7</sup> with almost all of their programming and commentary available there.

The network has been successful in providing round-the-clock in-depth coverage of major Russian breaking news and has often been referenced in other major Western media outlets at times of crisis (prominent examples include the Moscow bombings in March 2010 and January 2011, Polish President Lech Kaczynski's plane accident in 2010, and the 2008 South Ossetia war). However, its rhetoric is often strongly anti-American/Western, and clearly demonstrates an attempt on behalf of Moscow to stand up to what one of its hosts, Peter Lavelle, referred to as "Western Media Hegemony" (Lavelle, 2010). RT's choice of the topics, the framing, the tone, as well as over-reliance on conspiracy theories and obscure sources raise questions about its credibility and even truthfulness. Arguably, therefore, the network often works against Russia's public diplomacy interests, particularly, among the highly critical and selectively predisposed American public. What is more, despite its attempt to present a new and cool Russia, the network often slips into perpetuating various stereotypes and misperceptions about Russia that still persist in the West. A good example of it is the "Hot for Words" project,<sup>8</sup> providing "appealing" crash-courses in basic Russian by a scantily clad young woman.<sup>9</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Russian officials have become increasingly aware of their public diplomacy problem. Hence, over the past decade, Kremlin as well as the Russian academic community has started paying increasing attention – both in word and by deed – to Russia's image and perceptions abroad. This concern has become even more salient due to Russia's aspiration to a "Global Power" status and the need to be recognized as such, not just by its traditional "allies" but more importantly, by the

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<sup>4</sup> See "All About Russia": <<http://rt.com/all-about-russia>>

<sup>5</sup> See "Meet Friends": <<http://meetfriends.rt.com>>

<sup>6</sup> See "RT – On Air": <<http://rt.com/on-air>>

<sup>7</sup> See <<http://www.youtube.com/RussiaToday>> and <<http://www.youtube.com/RTAmerica>>

<sup>8</sup> See "Hot for Words": <<http://hotforwords.rt.com>>

<sup>9</sup> See Osipova, Y. (2010). "Russian 101: R-Rated PD." *Global Chaos* for further discussion. <<http://lena-globalchaos.blogspot.com/2010/07/russian-101-r-rated-pd.html>>

West. In part, this is also due to the need to attain positive self-esteem, which is emphasized by the lack of a clear internal consensus about Russia's identity and policy priorities.

As has been discussed in this paper, Russia has started to actively implement numerous initiatives to ameliorate the situation and to win over the hearts and minds of the international public. In doing so, a major emphasis is put on promoting a "new" and modern Russia that is economically strong and politically stable. However, Russia's centralized and top-down socio-political culture, the origins of which can be traced back to the early days of its statehood, is very much reflected in its communication style with foreign publics. Kremlin has mostly monopolized the work of public diplomacy, and despite all the talk about engaging civil society actors and non-governmental organizations (both, domestically and abroad), it still tends to control the process, even if indirectly. Furthermore, the identity crisis referred to above is most evident in the Russian statements and literature on public diplomacy, which attempts to integrate Western concepts and terminology into its traditional Russian communication style, while demonstrating clear resistance to flexibility and openness.

The major issues with Russian public diplomacy, therefore, are two-fold. First is the actual approach and conceptualization of the issue. Russia has set out to achieve "soft power" around the world, without fully grasping the specific attributes and nature of the concept. The greatest problem in this regard is the lack of attention to the centrality of credibility in the quest for soft power, as both the conceptualization and the practice of various soft power and public diplomacy-related programs do not take that into account. Russian officials and scholars have repeatedly stated the importance of extending Russia's soft power to the West. And yet, most of the related projects and initiatives remain focused on the former Eastern bloc (particularly the CIS member states) and/or primarily target Russians living abroad, all of whom already share a cultural or historical bond with the country. The lack of underlying credibility, therefore, undercuts all other public diplomacy initiatives undertaken by Russia, sometimes making the situation even worse due to selective perception and interpretation.

Second major issue of the Russian approach is its communication style, which is especially problematic in the case of the United States. As already noted, the American public opinion tends to regard Russia in a more negative light, which coupled with the cultural stereotypes, unfriendly (if not biased) media, and fairly hostile rhetoric by American officials, creates the perfect environment for perpetuating these negative attitudes. Recognizing this, Russia

has tried to address the problem through obvious perception management and by filling the perceived information gap. However, its top-down, centralized and information-heavy approach to public diplomacy is arguably incompatible with the more open and direct communication style preferred in the American culture. Creating a multitude of new information outlets – no matter how “cool” or modern – cannot be as influential as the effective utilization of the already existing information channels in the West, since those are already perceived as credible and acceptable by the intended audiences.

What is more, Russia’s attempts are yet to demonstrate signs of success and even run the risk of backfiring, given the Americans’ predisposition to selectively interpret Russia’s communication to conform to the predominant societal attitudes as well as their pre-existing personal worldviews. In order to find the key to the hearts and minds of the American public, therefore, Russia will need to change its communication style and cultivate credibility through audience-centric, culturally-specific and ethical approaches. Most importantly, Russian officials should recognize the fact that effective public diplomacy cannot be seen as sugar-coating, and that mere attempts at image-management cannot make up for bad policies.

Thus, the path towards successful public diplomacy *around the world* should start at home. Not only should the Russian government together with the Russian society come up with a generally acceptable identity and foreign policy – a grand strategy of some kind – but they should also recognize that in order to project a positive image to which it aspires, Russia first needs to *embody* it. That is true especially regarding its political openness and foreign policy conduct. Ultimately, in the age of globalization and increasingly horizontal communication patterns, strategies that are mostly carried out or controlled by the government have very small chances of success, particularly in highly-saturated information environments and fundamentally different cultural contexts.

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